

In Which An Old Habit is Revisited by the-singular-peep

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Summary: Of course, Hopper wasn't really all that surprised, deep down. In the single day she had been under his care, he had noticed that a number of her actions seemed odd for her age. This was just one more to add onto the list, and he couldn't find himself to be upset. [IN WHICH EVERYTHING IS OKAY SERIES. COMPLETE. PART 3/?. PT2: "IN WHICH ELEVEN CATCHES THE FLU."]

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December 28, 1983. Wednesday. November 6, 1984. Tuesday.

It started the first time she felt safe and warm in Hopper's home.

Or, at least, that's when it was noticed.

That day, when Hopper found her in the woods, cold, and wet, and hungry, he had instantly brought her to that little cabin. Before they even began to clean, he had wrapped her snugly in a blanket and hugged her tight to his chest. She hesitated, but within a few moments Hopper felt her relax in his arms and, while not quite returning the embrace, he knew she was content.

After getting warmed up and Hopper feeding Eleven a squished up granola bar he had hidden away in his pocket, they had started to clean. After cleaning, Hopper had left Eleven on the couch in her blanket and had told her to "Stay here, I'm gonna go get us some real food."

He had first gone back to his home. He knew the water was working in the old cabin, but he wasn't sure if there were any toiletries left, and so he grabbed the essentials - towels, toilet paper, a tooth brush, washcloths, a half empty bottle of shampoo, and some socks.

And a six pack of beer from the fridge.

He then traveled to the closest grocery, where he picked up a second toothbrush, two throw blankets, a carton of juice, and the closest pair of child pajamas he could find (A ten dollar long sleeve sleep shirt decorated with a Garfield print, sized only by Hopper eyeballing them).

And some Eggos.

He returned in approximately an hour and a half. He piled his groceries into one arm, fished the key out of his pocket, and unlocked the door. It opened easily - he'd have to get that in check with more

locks - and he was soon standing in his living room, completely surprised by what he saw.

There sat Eleven, curled up under her blanket and eyes shut completely, soft snores coming from her frail form, and pink splotches from finally getting warmed up dotting her pale cheeks.

And, tucked expertly into her mouth, was her right thumb.

Eleven, the girl who could kill a man just with her mind, who had nearly killed them all - and had saved them all - and who had survived on her own in the wilderness for who knows how long, was sucking her thumb.

Of course, Hopper wasn't really all that surprised, deep down. In the single day she had been under his care, he had noticed that some of her actions seemed odd for her age, like the way she rocked on her heels when she thought no one was looking or how she used tiny, misshapen sentences or how she seemed skittish like she was always afraid she'd get in trouble. He supposed that was from years of abuse, and he couldn't get onto her about it. It was sad, really, and he hated to see her try to act grown up when really she wasn't. He hoped he hadn't pressured her into doing so. `

And so he ignored her thumb sucking, ignored the way she ripped it away instantly and jumped when he spoke, and moved into the kitchen.

"C'mon, kid. Let's get some lunch."

From then on, Hopper was aware of Eleven sucking her thumb. And he was also aware of how afraid she was that he would catch her.

It made Hopper sick to think that someone could punish a child for something like that. He supposed part of Eleven starting to bring back the childish habit was to test the limits - would he punish her, or would he not mind? Of course, Hopper didn't mind, though he may have to put a stop to it soon because he can't afford to get her braces.

He would catch her with her thumb in her mouth while she was

working on her math workbook, focusing hard on the numbers. He would catch her with it when she was watching Soap Operas at home when she thought he was busy. He would catch her with it whenever he peeked in to check on her at two am when he woke up afraid something had happened to her.

After a while, Eleven stopped hiding it.

It started slowly, one day when Hopper was reading to her at bedtime. Carefully, she moved her thumb to her mouth and tucked it in, eyes trained on her father figure. He didn't look up, though he did notice, and she took that as a good sign.

The next time they were sitting at breakfast. She had finished eating and was just kicking her feet waiting for instruction and he was reading the news paper. She plopped her thumb into her mouth quickly and waited to be admonished. She wasn't. She made a little grunting noise, just to see what would happen, and Hopper looked up. He locked eyes with her, and then went back to the newspaper.

The next time she was sitting in his lap and they were watching *As The World Turns* together. It was midday after lunch, and she was tired. Without even thinking, her thumb was between her lips and she was dozing off. Hopper shifted and she jumped a little before sheepishly looking up at him. He didn't take his eyes off the screen.

"Look, kid, if that's something that'll calm you down, go for it. You don't gotta hide it or keep trying to see if I'll get on to you, 'cause I won't. Now explain to me why the heck Paul was a baby three weeks ago and now he's a sixteen year old with an agenda."

From then on out, she wasn't afraid. She wasn't looking for approval, and she didn't worry about it anymore.

It wasn't often that her thumb found its way to her mouth, not now that she wasn't testing Hopper's limits, but now when she was panicking about something, or crying, or angry, she could calm herself down without help. Most of the time, of course.

Secretly, Hopper found it endearing. Sara sucked her thumb when she was little, and seeing Eleven do the same made him smile - she

trusted him, and it was good that she had a way to calm down.

The last two weeks before That Night, Eleven had stopped. Hopper should have known that she was getting antsy just from that. That she wasn't quite sure if she could trust him anymore. He was breaking promises - he didn't mean to, but it would just happen. And he hadn't been able to read to her at night recently, because he was busy with paperwork he had forgotten about. He wasn't returning for dinner. And, as a result, Eleven had stopped calming herself down. She had stopped trying to suppress her tantrums by shoving her thumb in her mouth and breathing, had stopped using the habit as a reason not to cry because if she cried she couldn't breathe from her nose, had stopped trusting him with seeing her fragile side.

He should have noticed.

The night Eleven closed the gate - That Night - Hopper had driven Eleven back to the Byers' after dropping by the Emergency Room. She had almost been asleep, Hopper noted, when he began speaking to her.

"You did so good, kid. You did so, so good. I am so proud of you, you know that?" He reached to ruffle her hair, but ended up just petting her instead, completely surprising himself with the sweet gesture. "You know that?" He repeated.

Eleven smiled the tiniest smile Hopper had ever seen and nodded once, her eyes tearful and exhausted, before she carefully tucked her right thumb in between her blood covered lips and closed her eyes.